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ABSTRACT

Black newspapers should not go unnoticed by school administrators, as they too often are. Black people have a long and proud history of intraracial communication. More than 200 "black" periodicals work hard at forming, leading, and interpreting for black communities. No black community is totally dependent upon the standard white-owned and majority oriented press for information basic to the forming of public attitudes towards education and desegregation. Lack of familiarity with black newspapers may be because most are published virtually unnoticed and are relatively amateurish. Also, dubious but often unchallenged social theories support the educator's avoidance of the local black press. There are many reasons why an educator might read a black newspaper with some regularity. He may gain insight into what black leaders say to the black community and how the black community really places them in its constellation of influences. Also, what does the community value, and how does it value his activities? Thus, judicious reading of the black press may broaden the dimensions of his understanding of the black community without spending a fortune on another resented study. (Author/JM)

BLACK NEWSPAPERS: OVERLOOKED BAROMETERS

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NCRIEEO TIPSHEET #1

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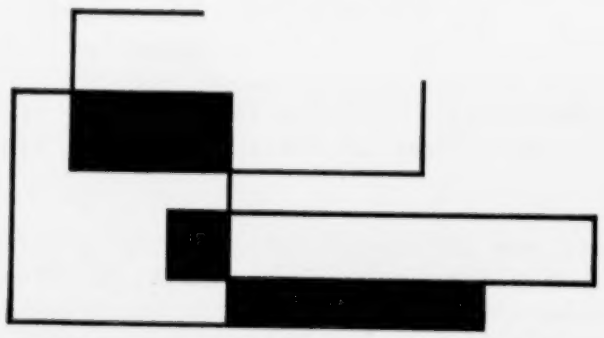

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Box 40
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027
(212) 870-4804

Edmund W. Gordon, Ed.D.
Director

Wendell J. Roye, M.S.
Assistant Director

UD011161

"....We just cannot reach them!"

"Letters to parents, leaflets on the street corners, spot announcements--they don't read or hear..."

"What about 'their' newspapers?"

"They have only two things, EBONY and JET--nothing else any good. If they only had newspapers like we do..."

The very concerned school administrators in this exchange are, unfortunately, more typical than many of us want to believe. "They" do indeed have newspapers just like French-Americans, Jewish-Americans, German-Americans, and a host of other ethnic groups and sub-groups in the country.

The presence of black newspapers should not be so unnoticed. Newspapers in the United States are being published in fifty languages. Many minorities in the country have in-group news publications. A notable large group weak in such media are American-Indians. "Ayers Directory" has a listing showing less than a dozen American-Indian publications, but rash is the person who will wager that there will not be more, in view of the growing Indian militancy. Waiting patiently in the wings for all of us to come to our senses and concentrate on publications everyone can read are periodicals in Esperanto, once the dream of world language.

One undisputable fact of black life in the United States is that black people have a long and prideful history of intra-racial communication. FREEDOM'S JOURNAL, edited by John B. Russworm, was published in 1927 in New York City. The nation was then in its political and technological infancy. Today, there are more than two hundred "black" periodicals working hard at forming, leading and interpreting for black communities.

Some of these newspapers are truly outstanding examples of excellent journalism. THE NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS, for example, is black-owned and directed and is widely recognized as possibly the largest and best *metropolitan* weekly newspaper in the country. THE COURIER is a *national* black weekly, with special geographical editions distributed nationally. It is probably safe to say that no black community in the country is totally dependent upon the standard white-owned, and majority-oriented press for information basic to the forming of public attitudes towards public education and desegregation. Like an overlooked barometer, the black press is often ignored as it warns of approaching storms or calms.

A large metropolitan daily may proclaim, editorialize, and report with awesome efficiency on details of education events and related conditions. In the shadow of its quill a sometimes prestigious, sometimes shoe-string,

black weekly circulated without fanfare in the black communities may have more profound effects upon what black parents and community leaders feel and think on an issue and program such as desegregation. The ethnic press can influence greatly the degree to which people help or hinder a weak desegregation program. The full page advertisements may insist that anybody who is anybody reads THE INQUIRER in Philadelphia. THE INQUIRER enjoys a well merited circulation of over one half million. School officials on a collision course with the black community and the new breed of determined black mothers might well be wise to also read THE TRIBUNE.

The venerable PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE has been published by and for black folks in the city of brotherly love since 1884 and has a circulation of over thirty five thousand. That means a sale to one black in each twenty in the city--that's good circulation, bearing in mind each subscription is being read by two to five people, the potential influence should be readily seen. A little wiser is the teacher who reads THE TRIBUNE before presuming to know what blacks in that city are likely to think and do.

One thousand-ninety two miles away in Des Moines, Iowa, while the big daily REGISTER and a different TRIBUNE comb the city for news with a widely respected team of outstanding journalists, THE IOWA BYSTANDER, circulation two thousand quietly get a message to a small black community. THE BYSTANDER so aptly named, has been published since 1894. The small, deceptive circulation glosses over the fact that it can be a force to be reckoned with. Two thousand is a good circulation for the black community in Des Moines. It means approximately one copy sold for every six blacks in the community.

The recurring mystery is why black newspapers so often surprise educators. Foreign language and ethnic newspapers are of importance to all the other racial and cultural sub-groups in America, why not blacks? Politicians keep a wary eye on them, why not educators?

Lack of familiarity with black newspapers may also be because most are published unnoticed by everyone except their loyal readers and in comparison to standard dailies many are amateurish. Also, dubious but often unchallenged, social theories promote blind spots in otherwise careful planning and thinking. Notably working to cause overlooking of the black newspaper is the "carbon copy" theory. Advocates of the "carbon copy" theory of racial life in America insist, often obliquely, too often, that much of black life in the United States is a "carbon copy" of white life. So, why bother with a copy when the real thing is available.

Positive thinking would direct the conclusions more positively. A strong press among blacks was inevitable. It has at least as much impact as the press of other minority groups. It actually has greater and wider impact because of the size and dispersion of the black group and the multitude of factors which continue to bind the group together and generally prevent easy individual escape from the group. Indications are that an educator wrestling with local desegregation issues would do well to help complete the job by considering as much pertinent data as possible and might begin by locating and reading a black newspaper which is being read by his constituencies.

A discerning historian can note something symbolic and evocative in even the names of some of the publications of the black community. The names are not casually chosen--they are often messages. THE IOWA BYSTANDER; THE KANSAS CITY CALL, established in 1919, now has a circulation of eighteen thousand; THE OKLAHOMA CITY BLACK DISPATCH was founded in 1915, long before the widely preferred racial designation was "black," circulation eleven thousand; and THE JACKSON ADVOCATE, circulation five thousand, was founded in 1939 and has been advocating ever since in Jackson, Mississippi.

So the thinking desegregationists decide to read, "what they are reading," and get some clues to potential reaction and cooperation. What should be read? He thumbs through "Ayers' Directory of Periodicals" and sees a listing of nearly two hundred "Negro Publications." What should he subscribe to and read?

A typical administrator might consider his own ethnic group, whatever it is. It has several newspapers which reach him. He probably subscribes to a weekly, and even reads portions of it once a month. He reads it more often if someone he knows personally writes for it and more often if a prominent educator lives in the city and does a guest column. He also receives but rarely reads, except at election time, a weekly linked to political leanings. At the office some administrators subscribe to a number of publications ranging from nationally distributed far-left shout-sheets to proper professional journals. It's the thing to do. He may note that the black custodian reads something unusual, but politeness prevents investigation--some people are rather touchy nowadays. He may suspect it is THE BLACK PANTHER being read covertly, but does not worry. Good upstanding Negro-Americans working for "us" (or is it Afro-Americans or Blacks, or...) are not unduly swayed by such. Why should an educator have to read an extra newspaper and what extra newspaper?

There are many reasons why an educator might read a black newspaper with some regularity. Among them, "everyone" knows what black leaders say to the white community. If his statements are "good" or "out-

rageous" and "loud," it is carried in the regular media. On the other hand, a subscription to a small weekly circulated in the school district may give more insight into what the black leader says to the black community and how the black community really places him in its constellation of influences. What black constituencies exist? How is what school officials say and do interpreted in this most concerned community. Who is respected in the black community and how is this respect expressed? What is important to black parents of the children we are trying to desegregate and teach? How is social time in the community spent? What are the people in the black establishment concerned with--yes, there is a black establishment. Where do "they" get some of the ideas the school district has to deal with?

The school board president may not have to read an extra newspaper. In many areas he does not have to read anything but reports and studies prepared by the school system's professional hierarchy--and miss something. That which he misses is sometimes something which may be helpful, and is often interesting. On the other hand, the professional worker must know that something has to be effective.

Such reading may, of course, rudely shake some firmly held fantasies. On Sunday, half the black population is not nursing hangovers, nor swinging the gospel in a heavily mortgaged church recently bought from a white congregation that moved out to a better neighborhood. All too frequently, there may be a meeting with schools on the agenda.

Why Have Them?

Black journals exist because of a necessity. To be successful and survive like any other business, they were started by men with vision who saw a need and tried to fill it. It is a vital need they strive to fill. It is perhaps best understood in general terms of ethnic identity wishing, a craving for additional facts and relevant truth, a reaching out for truly including news. The need is also based upon concepts of mutual respect and confidence reflected or not reflected in the regular media. And tying the many needs and motivations together is a deep-seated need individuals have for linkage within subcultures.

What Are Black Newspapers Like?

Many of these newspapers are sluggers. Very little tea-and-crumpet journalism here. The first reactions are, at first, often strong. Criticism is easy to find. They write too much about crime. They depress. Really? Well, consider a typical handling of a story. A man leaving the elevator in a public housing project in New York City noticed another man forcing a young girl towards the roof. Concerned for the girl, he followed and intervened as the girl was about to be raped. The rescuer was killed. The daily press carried the story with reasonable detail. The black AMSTERDAM NEWS carried the story complete with an artist's sketch of the killer and details of the life and style of the conscientious citizen; then, only, did it become clear that the hero was a very courageous black man. The big daily press either missed or ignored what was additionally important to the black community. Desegregation programs suffer similarly.

The social page is a caricature of what goes on in the white community. Perhaps. But with notable exceptions, where does a black learn something about who the black teachers are marrying. Where will the principal learn the social status of "that woman" who is so influential and vocal at PTA? She is not a doctor's wife, doesn't teach and is apparently not well educated. Her ideas make their way back to school board meetings and into the school... Who is she anyway? What are the local black clubs doing? Clear pictures may suddenly leap from the page.

What really happened to some of the former outstanding black students and teachers...? Could that be because of previous experiences with the school system? They are an important force in helping or sabotaging programs.

By judicious reading of the black press one may broaden the dimensions of understanding of the black community without spending a fortune on another resented study. One can get the feel of the national black community and more insight into localized black attitudes as well. The first step is to want to know more about the black community. A reasonable next first step is to select newspapers. From a list of national publications select one or two. They may or may not compare well with what one is accustomed to. Subscribe just the same and read them regularly. Select from this representative list:

The Nationals

THE NEW YORK AMSTERDAM NEWS, 2340 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10027; Subscription $7.00 per year. Weekly. Founded 1909

THE PITTSBURGH COURIER (National Edition), Centre Avenue at Francis Street, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15219. Subscription $8.00 per year. Weekly. Founded 1910

THE AFRO-AMERICAN (National Edition), Afro-American Company, Publisher, 628 North Eutaw Street, Baltimore, Md. 21203. Subscription $7.25 per year. Weekly. Founded 1892

THE BLACK PANTHER, Black Community News Service, Box 2967, Custom House, San Francisco, Calif. Subscription $7.50 per year. Weekly. Founded 1965.
MUHAMMAD SPEAKS, 2548 South Federal Street, Chicago, Ill. 60616. Subscription $7.80 per year. Weekly.
CHICAGO DEFENDER, 2400 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. Subscription $8.00 per year. Weekly. Founded 1905.

A reasonable next step, select a black weekly published in a community similar in some way to your own. The following suggestions may be helpful:

BIRMINGHAM MIRROR, 1517 Fourth Avenue, Birmingham, Alabama. Circulation 15,000. Black Population 171,000 (40%)
LOS ANGELES SENTINEL, 1112 East 43rd Street, Los Angeles, California 90011. $11.00 per year--weekly founded 1934. Circulation 38,000. Black population 700,000 (23%).
DENVER BLADE, 3224 Downing Street, Denver, Colorado 80205. $6.00 per year--weekly founded 1961. Circulation 10,000. Black population 51,000 (10%).
ATLANTA DAILY WORLD, 210 Auburn Avenue, N.E., Atlanta, Georgia 30303. $16.12 per year--daily founded 1928. Circulation 30,000. Black population 212,000 (39%).
INDIANAPOLIS RECORDER, 518 Indiana Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana 46207. $7.80 per year--weekly founded 1893. Circulation 11,000. Black population 145,000 (29%).
LOUISVILLE DEFENDER, 1720 Dixie Highway, Louisville, Kentucky 40203. $6.00 per year. Founded 1933. Circulation 4,823. Black population 91,000 (24%).
NEW ORLEANS LOUISIANA WEEKLY, 640 South Rampart Street, New Orleans, Louisiana 70112. $7.80 per year--weekly founded 1925. Circulation 17,000. Black population 303,000 (45%).
DETROIT MICHIGAN CHRONICLE, 479 Ledyard Street, Detroit, Michigan 48201. $7.80 per year--founded 1936. Circulation 50,000. Black population 800,000 (47%).
MINNEAPOLIS SPOKESMAN, 3744 Fourth Avenue, South, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55409. Weekly founded 1934. Circulation 11,000. Black population 21,000 (5%).
IOWA BYSTANDER, 221 Locust Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309. $3.50 per year--weekly founded 1894. Circulation 2,800. Black population 11,000 (5%).
OKLAHOMA CITY BLACK DISPATCH, Black Publishing Company, P.O. Box 1254, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73101. $4.08 per year--weekly founded 1915. Circulation 15,000. Black population 72,000 (18%).
KANSAS CITY CALL, Kansas City Call Company, Inc., 1715 East 18th Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64141. $7.50 per year--weekly founded 1919. Circulation 15,000. Black population 120,000 (24%).
JACKSON ADVOCATE, 406½ North Farish Street, Jackson, Mississippi 39202. $4.00 per year--weekly founded 1939. Circulation 7,500. Black population 55,000 (36%).
CLEVELAND CALL AND POST, 1940 East 105th Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44101. $7.50 per year--weekly founded 1921. Circulation 27,000. Black population 305,000 (38%).
HOUSTON FORWARD TIMES, 4411 Almeda Road, Houston, Texas 77001. $6.25 per year--weekly founded 1960. Circulation 27,000. Black population 310,000 (27%).
HOUSTON INFORMER AND TEXAS FREEMAN, Freedom's Publishing Company, 2418 Leeland Avenue, Houston, Texas 77003. $6.00 per year--weekly founded 1893. Circulation 3,000.
DALLAS EXPRESS, 2604 Thomas Avenue, Dallas, Texas 75204. $6.00 per year--weekly founded 1892. Circulation 3,000. Black population 200,000 (25%).
NORFOLK JOURNAL AND GUIDE, 719 East Olney Road, Norfolk, Virginia. $6.00 per year--weekly founded 1899. Circulation 24,000. Black population 89,000 (23%).
PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE, 524-526 South 16th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19146. $10.00 per year--weekly founded 1884. Circulation 38,000. Black population 700,000 (32%).

Next, select a newspaper published or circulated in the school district where you work. In some rare cases one may be difficult to find. Do not be put off, if there are sizeable numbers of blacks around, something is being circulated--get it. A short tour of the newsstand in the black community helps. The news vendor will know what is being purchased and read. He may not know accurately how well mail subscriptions are being sold. The closer the publication office is to your office, the better.

The sizes, formats and staffs of Negro newspapers vary greatly. Some reflect extensive journalistic expertise; some echo nothing but spirit and commitment. The physical aspects should be initially ignored. The black newspaper is for reading, not for decorous mounting on a wall.

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